

“JUST WAR”

1 Peter 2:11-17

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

November 12, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

**One of the most concerning concepts for Christians,
is what should our attitude be towards “war.”**

**On the one hand, we are instructed by the Ten Commandments:
“Thou shalt not kill.” Exodus 20:13**

**Then Matthew quotes Jesus as saying:
“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you
on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”
Matthew 5:39**

**On the one hand, God sent Joshua and Gideon
and a host of other leaders into battle.**

**On the other hand, Jesus said we are to “love our enemies.”
So, what’s a Christian to do?**

Some of us have faced war and all its horror.

Some of us have had families affected by war.

Some of us may have children or grandchildren

**who will serve in the military
and perhaps participate in war.**

**We may find ourselves questioning the precarious balance
between being loyal to the teachings of Jesus
and the obeying the requirements of the nation;
seemingly caught on the horns of a dilemma . . .
. . . Christianity vs. patriotism.**

**Fortunately, that dilemma has been argued for us
by military leaders, philosophers, theologians,
ethicists and policy makers.**

**The goal and purpose of their discussions
is to ensure war is morally justifiable
by applying a series of criteria,
all of which must be met
for a war to be considered just.**

It is called the “Just War Theory.”

**Without turning this sermon into a lecture,
let me summarize Just War Theory
and then apply it to how Christians are to view war.**

JUST WAR THEORY:

We have Augustine to thank

for most of what we know about “Just War.”

Augustine was faced with the challenge

**of explaining how devout Christians could in good conscience
assume the full obligations of citizenship
including participating in wars.**

What made it so challenging

**was that those who were critical of participation in war –
or other obligations of the government –
seemed to have the teachings of Jesus to rely upon.**

Even though Jesus never addressed war directly,

**He did have strong messages about love and compassion
which seemed incompatible with violence and killing.**

Augustine addressed Jesus’ saying:

**“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the
other also,”**

**by arguing that what is required
is not bodily action, but an inward disposition.**

The attitude behind the act.

Augustine insists there is no "private right" to kill.

One can kill only under the authority of God,

**as communicated by direct or implicit command from God,
or by a legitimate ruler who carries out God's intent
to restrain evil on earth.**

**Augustine further suggests that one who obeys such a command
"does not himself 'kill.' "**

One acts only as an instrument of the one who commands.

When there is no command by God,

**war may be waged only by those with legitimate authority,
and only for a just cause.**

Luther held to a "just war" view,

limiting the reason a war could be fought.

Calvin justified certain types of war,

He emphasized that a Christian soldier

should never use force to gain self-advantage,

but "use force out of love for thy neighbor."

That "love of neighbor" sometimes calls us to right a wrong,

or to stop people from being persecuted

or to preserve a way of life that is just and fair to all.

**Thus, the theory postulates that war, while terrible,
is not always the worst option.**

Sometimes doing nothing in the face of evil is worse.

**So, those who have studied the “just” reasons for war
have given us four criteria for a just war:**

- 1. War is justified when it serves to protect innocent civilians from an invader; correcting a suffered wrong; but never for material gain or economic reasons.**
- 2. Justice sometimes demands that we engage in war.**
- 3. Individuals do not have the right to carry out a war; this is the job of legitimate governments. This means a political authority within a political system that allows distinctions of justice.**
- 4. War must be carried out in the most just way, and not only with just cause. The ends do not justify all means.**

**All agree that war should always be a last resort;
used only after all peaceful and viable alternatives
have been seriously tried and exhausted
or where alternatives are clearly not practical.**

As to how this reconciles with turning the other cheek,

John Stott, Anglican priest, author and evangelical leader

explained it this way,

“If my house is burglarized one night and I catch the thief, it may well be my duty to sit him down and give him something to eat and drink, while at the same time phoning the police.”

APPLICATION:

**We are not the first Christians to wrestle with war –
or what our duty might be to the government.**

**Peter, the Apostle, addressed the churches under his care
and advised them to “keep their behavior excellent.”**

**What Christians say and do is observed by the world
and not only are *we* judged by our deeds – or lack thereof –
non-Christians see what we do – or not do –
and judge Christianity on their observations.**

**Let me give you an example of how our decisions and actions
Have much larger consequences.**

Let’s say you live in a medium-sized town in the Mid-west.

**In that town there are two churches: Church A and Church B.
Let’s say that the doctrines and dogma of each church
is essentially the same; no significant differences.**

**Church A takes good care of its members;
has an adequate worship service and a comfortable building.
As does Church B.**

**However, Church A spends most of its money, time and talent
on improving the building and grounds,
planning activities for the membership
and is hardly involved with the community.**

**Church B, on the other hand,
is involved in just about every aspect of community life,
from music and the arts to after school programs;
feeding the hungry, all sorts of charity work.**

**Which church would make the greatest impression
on someone who is either non-Christian or unchurched?**

**Each of us – and our churches – are judged by what we do.
So, it behooves us to keep our behavior “excellent.”**

**And “excellent behavior” extends to obedience to government
and the conduct of war.**

Peter went on to say that we should:

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶ Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God. ¹⁷ Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1 Peter 2:13-17

**And this is where the scripture
really begins to connect with our participation in war.**

**It seems clear,
that it is our duty – as instructed by God through Peter –
to submit ourselves to the authority of the government.**

**We don't always do that.
It seems like whenever we *feel* the government is wrong
we take to the streets, we take a knee,
we rebel and we riot;
we complain and we slander.**

**While it is true that the government is not always right –
after all it is a human institution –
acting in an unchristian manner is not acceptable.**

**Those who don the uniforms of the military
and take the oath to preserve and protect
do so for as many personal reasons as there are soldiers.**

**But they have one thing in common with each other –
and with the rest of us . . .
. . . they have agreed to abide by the laws of the government.**

**At the beginning of this worship service,
we stood with our hands over our hearts
and recited the pledge of allegiance.**

**Allegiance to the “republic” represented by our flag;
one unified nation,
following as best we can the will of God,
treating each other as justly as we can.**

**Remaining obedient to a just government is not always easy to do –
our duty to God and country has required personal sacrifice–
sometimes even the supreme sacrifice of lives –
and it will continue to do so.**

**May God bless us in our efforts,
strengthen us in our resolve,
forgive our failures
and lead us into a glorious future!**

PRAAYER:

God of all knowledge and wisdom, give us the wisdom and the strength to follow Your will. When the going gets tough, whisper words of encouragement to us. When we fall, pick us up, dust us off, and send us back into the world as a good example to others. This we pray in the Name of Jesus. Amen